

A Cognitive Semantic Study of Conceptual Blending in Selected Political Caricatures Used in American Election Campaign in 2020

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ABSTRACT

This study is intended to investigate the efficiency of Fauconnier and Turner's (2002) Conceptual Blending Theory to account for the construction of meaning in English political caricatures. The study aims to find out whether or not the viewer can infer the cartoonist's intended message by connecting the available mental inputs. It also aims at finding out whether or not the blending process covers the image, the verbal text, or both. The study aims to achieve the aims of the study, two types of procedures have been adopted: theoretical and practical. The first consists of presenting a theoretical framework of the adopted theory including its principles, mechanism, etc. The second consists of selecting a sample of political caricatures used in American presidential election campaign in 2020. The caricatures are quoted from three American newspapers: Newsday, Pittsburg Post-Gazette, USA Today. Three caricatures are about the Democratic candidate Joe Biden. The findings of the study show that conceptual blending theory and its mechanisms can account for meaning construction in political caricatures, and can enable viewers to infer their intended messages. It is also concluded that blending in political caricatures is mainly image-based rather than text-based.

Keywords

Blending Process, Mental Inputs, Meaning Construction.

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Introduction

Fauconnier and Turner's blending theory (also called Conceptual Integration Theory) has attracted scholars' attention in different fields of linguistics, yet there exist some areas which are still considerably virgin as far as this theory is concerned. Among these areas are political caricatures with which this study is concerned. It can be argued that a sort of uncertainty may exist over the applicability of this theory, and its efficiency to account for meaning construction in the phenomenon under study. In brief, the problem addressed in this study can be represented by the sort of controversy that may exist over the answers to the questions stated below:

1. Can conceptual blending theory explain meaning construction in political caricatures?
2. How can conceptual blending theory help the addressee to comprehend political

caricatures? What mental processes are involved in the process of comprehension?

3. In caricature analysis, does the blending process cover the image, the text, or both?

The study attempts to answer the questions stated above by verifying the hypothesis which states that Conceptual Blending Theory is equipped with the necessary mechanisms that enable viewers to analyse and understand political caricatures, and that blending in political caricatures is image-based rather than text-based. For this purpose, three political caricatures from different American newspapers are selected to be analysed in the light of Fauconnier and Turner's (2002) model.

Definitions and Overviews

As a cognitive theory, Conceptual Blending Theory developed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner seeks to clarify how extensive analogies and complex metaphors are constructed and interpreted. (Crystal, 2008: 57). According to this theory, elements and vital relations from different

scenarios are "blended" in a mental operation, which is supposed to be very common or universal to everyday thought and language. It is much like an attempt to create a unitary account of the cultural transmission of ideas (Ritchie, 2004: 31,50).

Simply, conceptual blending means a set of cognitive operations for blending or combining words, images, and ideas in a network of mental spaces to create meaning. In their book, *The Way We Think*, Fauconnier and Turner define this theory as a deep cognitive activity that makes new meanings out of old (2002: 159).

Conceptual blending is a basic mental operation that leads to new meaning, and general insight. This mental operation is useful for memory and manipulation of wide ranges of meaning. It plays a fundamental role in the construction of meaning in everyday life, arts, and sciences, especially social and behavioural sciences. The main thing of the operation is to make a partial match between two inputs, select elements or features from those inputs and blend them in a novel mental space, which then dynamically develops an emergent structure. It is suggested that the capacity for complex conceptual blending ("double-scope" integration) is the crucial capacity needed for thought and language (Fauconnier & Turner, 2003: 34)

Historical Background

The development of this theory began in 1993 in an online article entitled Conceptual Integration and Formal Expression. The roots of the theory are traced to Arthur Koestler (1964) who is famous for his *The Act of Formation*. In their book *The Way We Think*, Turner and Fauconnier (2002) presented a new version of the theory with somewhat different terminology (Fauconnier and Turner, 2008). Conceptual blending is one of the theoretical instruments used in *Where Mathematics Comes From* by George Lakoff and Rafael Núñez, who assert that "understanding mathematics involves mastering extensive networks of metaphorical blends" (Lakoff, 2003: 48)

The origin of blending theory is found in conceptual metaphor and mental space theory. If

we talk about architecture and the main concerns of blending theory, we can say that it is relevant to mental space theory. Some cognitive semanticists refer to blending theory as a stretch of mental space theory because it deals with the dynamic sides or aspects of meaning construction. It depends on mental space and mental space construction as part of its architecture. However, blending theory is different in that it was developed to explain the phenomena that mental spaces theory and conceptual metaphor theory couldn't explain. Moreover, blending theory adds an important theoretical development of its own. Meaning construction in blending theory involves the integration of structures which gives rise to more than the number of its parts.

Blending theorists hold that the process of conceptual blending is a general and basic cognitive operation that is central to the way we think. For instance, the category *pet fish* from (Fodor and Lepore 1996) is not simply the joining of the categories *pet* and *fish*. Instead, we selectively blend the aspects of the source categories *pet* and *fish* to produce a new category *pet fish* with its own distinct internal structure. This is achieved by conceptual blending (Evans and Green, 2006: 400).

Elements of Conceptual Blending

The conceptual blending process involves the following elements:

Input Spaces

Fauconnier and Turner (2002) consider the input spaces of a blend as mental spaces which are small conceptual packets built as we think and speak. Mental spaces are linked to schematic information by frames in which elements and relationships are arranged as a package about which we already know. These frames are also known as image schemas.

From these input spaces the selective projection starts, i.e. we do not take or use all the structures from the input spaces to the blend. We use only the matched information which is necessary for local understanding, as in:

(1) *In France, Bill Clinton wouldn't have been harmed by his relationship with Monica Lewinsky.*

The role of French president has a value in reality that is not projected to the blend. Neither is the fact that Clinton does not speak French, nor the fact that Clinton is unexpected to become president of France, nor the fact that he is unfit, and so on. In other words, a lot of structures in the input spaces are irrelevant to the emergent meaning. So, the process of selective projection is not restricted but flexible. (Evans and Green, 2006: 409).

Cross-space Mapping

According to Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 41), a partial cross-space mapping links counterparts in the mental spaces of the input. Consider the house-boat blend as an example, where the passenger of the boat is mapped to the liver of the house, and the travel relation between passenger and boats is mapped to the live-in relationship between liver and house.

Generic Space

The cross-space mapping refers to what the generic space makes or does, which basically contains what is shared by the two input mental spaces. For example, the mapping between passenger and resident in the house-boat blend suggests a generic space with a concept person that generalizes the concepts of passenger and liver (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 41).

Blend

It is the most precise statement about the actual blending operation. According to Fauconnier and Turner (2002: 47), “structure from two input mental spaces is projected to a new space, the blend. Generic spaces and blended spaces are related. Blends contain generic structure captured in the generic space, but also contain more specific structure, and they can contain structure that is impossible for the inputs”. The blend is neither the crossing nor the union of the input spaces. Parts of the input spaces are selectively projected into the blend, other parts do not

become part of the blend. For example, blending *house* and *boat* to *house-boat* requires selecting the concept *water* from the *boat* input space, but not the concept *land* from the *house* input space. The close relationship between the generic and the blend spaces makes it important for any formal model of blending to come to grip how the generic space arises from the blending process as well as what role it plays.

Emergent Structure

It is the additional structure in the blend which is not directly transcribed from the inputs (Fauconnier, 1994). There are three processes that give rise to emergent structure. First, composition of elements from separate inputs. In example (1), composition brings together the value of Bill Clinton with the role of the French president in the blend, resulting in Clinton as a French president. Second, completion which involves schema induction. Schema induction involves the unconscious and effortless recruitment of background frames. These complete the composition. In example (a), the process of completion introduces the frames for French politics and French moral attitudes. Without the structure provided by these frames, we would lose the central inference emerging from the blend which implies that Clinton's affair with Lewinsky would not harm him in France. This process of schema induction is called ‘completion’ because structure is recruited to ‘fill out’ or complete the information projected from the inputs in order to derive the blend. Finally, elaboration is the on-line processing that produces the structure unique to the blend. This process is sometimes called running the blend. (Evans and Green, 2006: 409).

Typical Conceptual Integration Network

Fauconnier and Turner (1994: 44) hold that “building an integration network involves setting up mental spaces, matching across spaces, projecting selectively to a blend, locating shared structures, projecting backward to inputs, recruiting new structure to the inputs or the blend, and running various operations in the blend itself.”

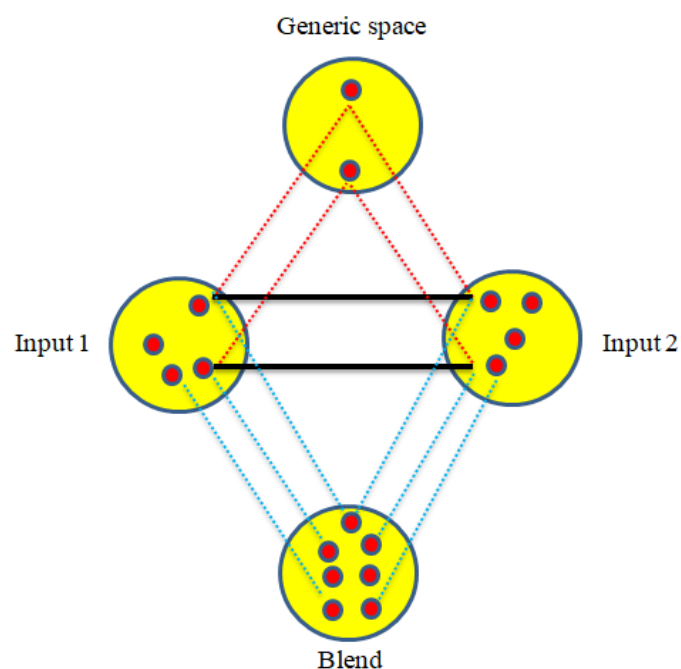


Figure 1. Typical Integration Network (adapted from Fauconnier and Turner 2002: 46)

On Political Caricatures

A political caricature is a common instrument of political debate between government and society, a representation or reaction of society to a political event, a set of events, or a person of the national or international level. They are made to express editorial commentary on politics, politicians, and current events. Such caricatures play a role in the political discourse of a society that provides freedom of speech and press. They are mostly opinion-oriented and can usually be found in print or electronic form on the editorial pages of newspapers and magazines. Usually, their subjects matter are current and important political issues. They require that readers have some clear background information about their subject matter in order for them to be understood. A political caricature is an artistic type characterized by both metaphorical and satirical or ironic language. Many artistic decisions (regarding symbols, signs, methods, composition, and so on) must be taken during the process of rendering or transforming opinions into such visual form. When doing so, the caricaturist must keep in mind if the viewer would be able to comprehend the editorial caricature. Political action is planned, followed, inspired, and carried out by language and cartoons in the contemporary world. It may

also be considered that politicians are concerned with using vocabulary or caricatures and cartoons to engage with the potential audience (Van Dijk, 1998: 11-30).

The first known political cartoon dates back to 1360 BC, in which Ikhnaton, the father-in-law of Tutankhamun, is described in an abandoned or neglected manner. Simplified forms of political cartoons were also found in Greek pottery images that ridiculed political leaders and praised the gods. Many inscriptions were also found on the walls to ridicule incompetent military leaders or public officials throughout the Roman Empire (Danjoux, 2007: 245).

Methodology

The Adopted Model

Fauconnier and Turner's (2002) conceptual blending theory is adopted in this study to analyse the texts under study. The reason behind adopting this model is that it is equipped with mechanisms that can account for construction of meaning in political caricatures. It also helps to illustrate how the reader mixes these inputs to arrive at the meaning intended by the cartoonist. The figure below shows the main elements of the adopted model.

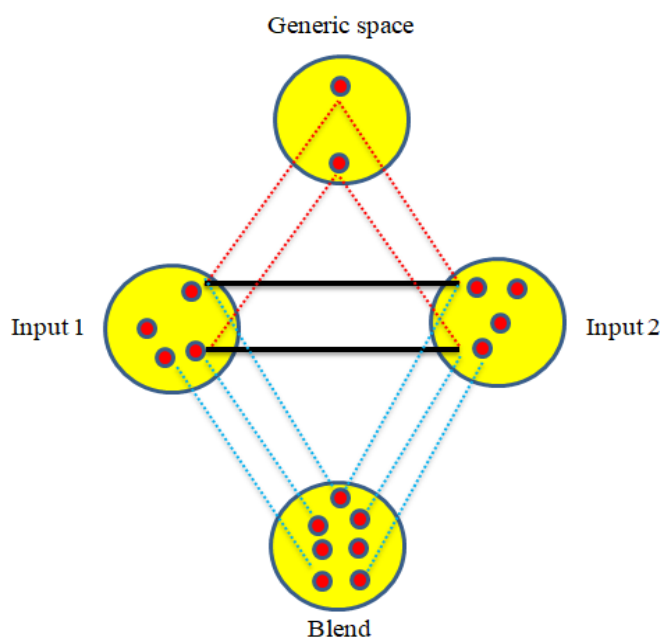


Figure 2. Elements of the Adopted Model

Method of Analysis

In analysing every caricature, an introduction to the designer and target caricature will first be given. Second, the caricature's aim, and its intended influence on the addressee will be considered. Finally, the analysis will cover the way the caricature designer exploits the linguistic and visual elements to create the blended concept based on the input spaces available in the caricature, and the mental strategies employed by the reader to realize this intended blended concept.

Data Collection

The selected sample of the present study consists of three caricatures used in Joe Biden's presidential election campaign in 2020. They are quoted from three American newspapers: Newsday, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, and USA Today.

Data Analysis

Analysis of Caricature No.1

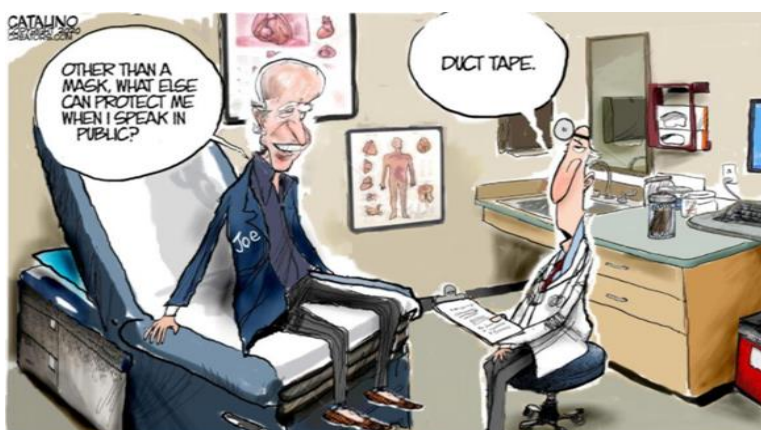


Figure 3. Caricature No.1

1. On the Caricature

This caricature was designed by Ken Catalino and published on 22, June 2020 by Newsday. Here, we see Joe Biden during the election campaign in a

doctor's clinic. He asks the doctor for something other than the mask to protect him from the public, because he used to wear a mask due to the spread of Coronavirus. It seems that he wants to speak to the public without a mask, but the doctor's response is unexpected as he tells him that he needs duct tape!

The caricature aims to tell the readers that Joe Biden is not good at speaking to the public. He always stutters, and that his silence is better than his speech. During his long career, Biden, who stuttered as a child, made some notable verbal blunders. During this campaign, he flubbed numbers, told tales, and mixed up events and locations. He admitted that sometimes he uses awkward phrases. In his 2017 book *Promise Me Dad*, he calls himself a "gaffe machine." Biden uses poor word choice when talking about race. For example, during an interview with Charlamagne Tha God, the host of *The Breakfast Club*, which is popular with Black listeners, Biden said: "If you have a problem figuring out whether you're for me or Trump, then you ain't Black." Biden pivoted to make a false statement that the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) had endorsed him in every campaign. Later, he walked back the "you ain't Black" comment.

2. Analysis of Network

The cartoon mocks Biden's speeches to the public. It forms a double space network that is composed of two input spaces. In the first, we see a Sick Person, and a Doctor. In the second, we see Biden, and Voter. The generic space contains schematic information relating to Election Campaign, The Candidate for the American Presidency, and the American Public Opinion on this Candidate, which motivates matching operations and thus cross-space connections between the two inputs. Both inputs project their frame structures to the blend. So in the blend we have, Biden Poor Word Choice When Talking, this means that his speeches harm his election campaign more than they benefit it and silence is better for him to protect himself from public criticism.

The linguistic text contributes clearly to the analysis of this caricature. The linguistic text sheds light on the mistakes Biden makes during

his speech. Therefore, in this caricature, the conceptual blending process depends largely on the inputs from the linguistic text, which helps to reveal the emerging meaning, which is the important part of the blending process.

Analysis of Caricature No.2

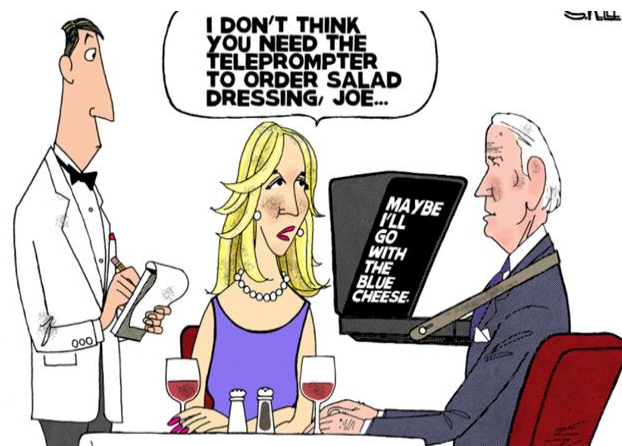


Figure 4. Caricature No.2

1. On the Caricature

This caricature was designed by Steve Kelley and published on 22, August 2019 by the *Pittsburg Post-Gazette*. Here, we see Biden with his wife Jill in a restaurant as the waiter takes orders. We also see that Biden uses the teleprompter hanging in his neck and his wife tells him "you don't need the teleprompter".

The caricature aims to show that Biden cannot improvise in his speeches. Instead, he uses the teleprompter. The problems that occurred during Biden's political speeches or television interviews were often used against him during the election campaign.

2. Analysis of Network

This caricature is based on the claim that Joe Biden was reading off of a teleprompter during a television interview held online. Trump's second son, Eric Trump, shared it on Twitter, along with a clip from the interview with José Díaz-Balart on *Noticias Telemundo*. The claim is written in a large text above the clip saying: "Biden caught red-handed using a teleprompter." President Donald Trump later retweeted the claim.

This caricature prompts for a simplex integration network that contains two inputs. The first contains the frame of roles of Customer, Restaurant, Order, and Waiter, The second contains values: Biden, US, Speech, and Public. The motivation for the cross-space connections is the generic space which contains the elements Presidential Candidate, Country, Political Speeches, and Voters. The integration network

compresses the role-value outer-space relations into uniqueness in the blend. So in the blend, we have the view that, *Biden is Unable to Improvise Political Speeches*. Once again, linguistic elements have an important role in clarifying the cartoonist intended ideology.

Analysis of Caricature No.3



Figure 5. Caricature No.5

1. On the Caricature

This caricature was designed by Andy Marlette and published on 10, November 2020 by USA TODAY NETWORK. Here, we see Joe Biden and Kamala Harris celebrating the victory of the US presidential elections. Harris wears boxing gloves with medical tape. They have traces of blood and a thorn is embedded in one of them. She also bears a baseball bat. There is also blood on the baseball bat and a nail embedded in it. We also see that Kamala Harris carries a bag containing a sword and a fighting tool that is used by Ninja fighters. However, Biden does not carry any fighting tool, but his fingers symbolize the letter V, which means victory.

The aim of this caricature is to inform the public that Biden had no role in winning the presidential election other than celebrating the victory. The important role was played by Harris, who led Biden to win the presidential elections, and without her, Biden would not have won.

2. Analysis of Network

This caricature prompts for a simplex integration network with two inputs. The first contains a frame with the roles of a Winner, and a Fighter. The second input contains the values of President (Biden), and Vice President (Harris). The motivation for the cross-space connections is the generic space which contains the elements Someone Watching, and Someone Who Does Everything. The integration network compresses the role-value outer-space relations into uniqueness in the blend in which we have the view that Biden did Nothing to Win the Presidential Election.

The visual elements in this caricature are sufficient to convey the cartoonist's idea to the reader. Therefore, it seems that the cartoonist is very professional. He uses no linguistic elements in the caricature except the names of Biden and Harris via which the readers know these two characters. Sometimes, it is difficult to recognize persons because of the exaggeration in displaying their physical characteristics.

Discussion of Results

The results of analysing the selected articles are discussed here in the form of answers to the research questions raised in chapter one (see 1.1).

1. Can conceptual blending theory explain meaning construction in political caricatures?

To answer this question, it can be argued that conceptual blending theory is equipped with appropriate mechanisms for analysing political caricatures. The typical structure of blending network makes the analysis of these caricatures easier. Recognizing the inputs helps to recognize the source and target concepts. Mapping across these inputs helps to recognize the common elements between these inputs shown in the generic space. These three spaces help the viewer to conclude the cartoonist's intended message created in the blended space. Thus, blending theory provides a computer-like system of mechanisms for the analysis of the texts under study.

2. How can conceptual blending theory help the addressee to comprehend political caricatures? What mental processes are involved in the process of comprehension?

Through analysing the selected data, it was found that conceptual blending theory can widely help the addressee to understand political caricatures and their intended messages by recognizing the elements of each input space aside, and then infer the elements shared by these inputs. Additional knowledge and familiarity with politics is required on the viewer's part. The process of blending results in the creation of an emergent structure in the blended space. This new structure, which is not found directly in any of the input spaces, is necessary to achieve a particular goal. The emergent structure is generated through the three following operations:

- a. Composition which provides relations between elements from separate input spaces.
- b. Completion which gives additional meaning associated with the elements in the input spaces.
- c. Elaboration which represents the dynamic running of the blend for the emergence of meaning. Of course, not everything from the input spaces is projected to the blend; projection is selective.

3. In caricature analysis, does the blending process cover the image, the text, or both?

To answer this question, it can be said that constructing the intended meaning in political caricatures depends on the cartoonist's style and the inputs he uses. Sometimes, the designer blends visual inputs that are sufficient to understand the caricature. At other times, it may be difficult to understand caricatures relying on visual inputs only. Therefore, the designer tends to rely on linguistic text to make his caricature understood. In general, a caricature that contains an image and text is easier to analyse or interpret than a caricature that contains only an image. Therefore, it can be said that when the cartoonist feels that the image alone cannot convey the intended message to the addressee, (s)he adds linguistic text. Thus, it can be stated that analysing political caricatures via conceptual blending processes mostly depends on both images and texts.

Conclusions

This study has come up with the following conclusions:

1. Conceptual blending theory is applicable to the analysis of political caricatures. Its mechanisms can enable viewers to easily analyze and understand these caricatures. It can also show the way meaning is constructed in the phenomenon under study. This verifies the first adopted hypothesis which states: "conceptual blending theory is equipped with the necessary mechanisms that enable viewers to analyze and understand political caricatures".
2. Blending in political caricatures is mainly image-based rather than text-based. This verifies the second adopted hypothesis which states "analyzing political caricatures using blending is image-based rather than text-based".
3. Operating the mechanisms of the theory is not easy. Actually, it is a complicated one. This verifies the third adopted hypothesis which states "the mechanisms used in conceptual blending theory are complicated".

4. Caricatures containing linguistic texts are often easier to understand and analyse than caricatures that contain only an image. Accordingly, caricature is a type of multimodal genre in which meaning is derived from the conceptual integration of image and text.
5. An important element in conceptual blending theory is the emergence of meaning in blended space. This element is often lacking in other cognitive theories like mental space, image schemas, conceptual metaphor, etc.
6. Conceptual blending theory relies heavily on individuals' general knowledge stored in long-term memory. Hence, linking inputs, analysing them, and arriving at the emerging meaning differs from one person to another.
7. It is difficult to define the role of the generic space in conceptual blending theory; it can be considered as a processing unit in the brain.

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